

New claim 18. An in-line egg labelling system for applying labels to eggs travelling on a conveyor, wherein:

- said eggs each comprise a longitudinal axis;
- said conveyor comprises a series of downwardly projecting egg grippers for suspending the eggs with the longitudinal axis of said eggs generally horizontal;
- said egg grippers are structured to leave a bottom longitudinal face of the suspended eggs unobstructed for application of a label;

and wherein the in-line egg labelling system comprises at least one labelling device itself comprising:

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a label applying member located beneath the series of egg grippers whereby, in operation, the label applying member applies labels to the unobstructed bottom longitudinal faces of the eggs suspended from the series of downwardly projecting egg grippers upon passage of said eggs about the label applying member.

New claim 19. An in-line egg labelling system, comprising:

a conveyor comprising:

a series of downwardly projecting egg grippers for suspending the eggs with a longitudinal axis of said eggs generally horizontal, wherein the egg grippers are structured to leave a bottom longitudinal face of the suspended eggs unobstructed for application of a label; and

at least one labelling device comprising:

a label applying member located beneath the series of egg grippers whereby, in operation, the label applying member applies labels to the unobstructed bottom longitudinal faces of the eggs suspended from the series of downwardly projecting egg grippers upon passage of said eggs about the label applying member.

Please amend claims 3-10, 12, 16 and 17 as follows:

Claim 3. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 19, wherein said conveyer is part of an egg packing and grading system comprising a controller and means for displacing each egg toward a given destination.

Claim 4. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 3, further comprising a computerised labelling control system and a user interface for an automatic individual selection of the eggs to be labelled on the basis of at least one user set parameter and at least one input parameter communicated by said controller.

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Claim 5. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 4, wherein the controller comprises means for generating an input parameter indicative of a destination of each egg.

Claim 6. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 4, comprising means for generating a user set parameter specifying for which destinations eggs are to be labelled.

Claim 7. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 4, comprising means for generating a first user set parameter specifying for which destinations eggs are to be labelled, and means for generating a second user set parameter specifying a desired ratio for the number of labelled eggs/number of packed eggs at a destination.

Claim 8. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 4, wherein said computerised labelling control system and user interface further comprise means for generating and outputting statistical data about labelling activities carried out by the labelling system.

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Claim 9. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 19, further comprising at least one sensing device for monitoring the position of eggs travelling on the conveyor.

Claim 10. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 19, further comprising an egg surface drying device.

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Claim 12. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 18, wherein said at least one labelling device comprises a label smoothing device for applying a slight pressure on applied labels to promote adhesion and proper conforming of labels to the bottom longitudinal faces of the eggs.

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Claim 16. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 19, wherein said conveyor comprises two parallel longitudinal rows of egg grippers and said labelling system comprises two labelling devices each dedicated to the labelling of eggs suspended from one of the two parallel rows of grippers.

Claim 17. (Amended) An in-line egg labelling system as recited in claim 19, wherein said conveyor comprise three parallel longitudinal rows of egg grippers and said labelling system comprise three labelling devices each dedicated to the labelling of eggs suspended from one of said three parallel rows of grippers.

Claims 11 and 13-15 are without change.

REMARKS

In the Office Action of February 12, 2003, claims 1-9, 12 and 14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Egosi (US Patent No. 4,843,958) in view of Brooks (US Patent No. 5,660,676).